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# *RUSTAVELI VOLUME*

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# THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE ABKHASIANS

**(From the materials on Abkhasian ethnography)**

By N. S. JANASHIA

[A translation of the article published in *Khristianskii Vostok*, The Christian East, Petrograd, 1915, vol. iv, No. 1, pp. 72–112.]

FOLLOWING the suggestion of N. Y. Marr that I should revise and translate into the Russian language my notes on "Materials on the ethnography of the Abkhasians", published 16–17 years ago in Georgian periodicals, chiefly in the journal *Moambe*, I made a careful review of all the collected "Materials", whether printed or still in manuscript form. In order to make the revision more complete I invited the aid of a special Commission from the Abkhasians of the village Adzvibzha, where the materials in question were actually collected. 114

The Commission consisted of the following persons: Mrs. Gidcha Janashia, my mother, with whose help the materials were checked originally; Kharikhan Tchengelia; Kelamat Delba, an eighty-year-old man, possessing a perfect knowledge of Abkhasian; Abdakhw Lolua, an orator; Alexis Dopua, who has a wide knowledge of tales and legends; Mushagw Tchengelia; and Alexis Janashia. The Commission worked with me for two days, the 2nd and 3rd July, 1914. 115

Furthermore, being still doubtful about certain aspects of my task, I checked the materials again at the meeting of the Adzvibzhuaans, during the month of August, and I found that all agreed in the main, differing only in matters of detail. One of my chief difficulties was that members of the Commission refused point blank to tell me tales I wanted to have in connection with my object, because "it is forbidden to tell tales in the daylight!" I therefore found it very hard to verify tales I had formerly taken down. So strong is the power of superstition nurtured for centuries! I am convinced that much that is incomprehensible in my "materials" would have been susceptible of explanation in the light of these tales. 124 [538] [128]

All the ceremonies and rites herein presented are described by a man who has taken an active part in their observance; at first, during his childhood, when he was imbued with profound religious feeling, and later in life when, although no longer professing "faith", he approached them with the greatest interest with a view to their study. I have endeavoured to record all the details, discovering in them curious survivals preserved through the popular beliefs and customs of the Abkhasians. In my opinion these details represent invaluable material for the scientific study of religious observance. 123

I was at one time very much tempted to use the material I had 121

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already collected for the writing of a full-size monograph dealing with the religious beliefs and customs of the K'art's, Ibers, and Svans. However, after some reflection I decided that the time was not ripe for such a task as some necessary data were lacking and I therefore decided to publish only the notes. Here and there, however, I have not been able to restrain myself from touching upon certain considerations and inquiries belonging to the larger plane, and these have overflowed in the form of footnotes.

The founders of Christianity, realizing that it was not so easy after all to eradicate from the consciousness of the majority of the population religious beliefs and rites observed for thousands of years, endeavoured to transform them, by wrapping them up in their own clothing and so adapting them to the Christian feasts and saints; thus they established their own annual festivals. Wherever possible I have followed in my account the established order of church festivals.

I should further point out that all the material herein described was collected in one village only, namely, Adzvibzha, in southern Abkhasia (the province of Abzhua), which, according both to Georgian and foreign (for instance, of the missionary A. Lamberti) historical sources constituted until the second half of the seventeenth century, part of Megrelia. This accounts for the fact that the Megrelian influence is so strongly noticeable. I think it is quite possible that some of the beliefs herein described may be capable of a different interpretation in Northern Abkhasia.

I begin my notes with Àyt'ar. In the first place, however, it will be expedient to explain my views on the chief deity *antswd*,* God.

*Antswd* is a compound word, consisting of *an*, "mother," and *tswa* (*ratswd*)—"many," which together denote "many mothers" or simply "mothers"; the word is thus in the plural form.[1] "In a formal or grammatical sense," says Dcharaia, "it is not an error; only the word 'mother' forms in the plural *ànts̲wa* and 'God'—*antswd*, i.e. the difference is in the accent. But in colloquial speech both words,

* The underlined *ts̲w* is a trigraph representing a sound uttered with one articulative effort or breath impulse, of which the digraph "*ts*" represents the front lingual affricate equivalent to German "*z*" (*Zeit*, time), and the labial semi-vowel "*w*", the labialization of the preceding "*ts*". "*Ts̲w*" thus represents a labialized variety of "*ts*". See N. Y. Marr, *The Abkhasian Analytical Alphabet* (in Russian), Leningrad, 1920, p. 31. [Translator's Note.]

[1] It would be premature at this stage to enter into the question of the identification of the conception "god", in Abkhasian, with "mother", and any attempt to give a morphological explanation of the form, which is incontestably the plural in *-tswa*, with the aid of the Abkhasian word *ratswa* would be superfluous (see N. Marr, *Definition of the Language of the Second Category of the Achaemenian Cuneiform Inscriptions* (in Russian), in *Zapiski* (Bulletin) of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archæological Society, St. Petersburg, 1915, §62. See also his *On the Origin of the Name Anapa* (in Russian). It is the usual linguistic method of the Abkhasians to interpret everything, even suffixes, such as the plural termination *-tswa* in the above instance, by means of the Abkhasian speech, with the aid of the Abkhasian words that survive to this day. [Note by the Editor of the *Kristianskii Vostok*.]

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'mothers' and 'God', are often pronounced in the same manner." [1] 776
"During the study of the different religious beliefs and customs of the Abkhasians," he continues, "we came across the following phrase among others: *antswà r-mɔzɔzɔ*—'the cause, guilt of God' (properly, 'the guilt or fault of gods,' N. Janashia). The roman r is the pronominal characteristic of the third person plural. . . . The above quoted construction—*antswà r-mɔzɔzɔ*—could not have been arrived at unless the word *antswà* was used in the plural," justly remarks the author; "were it in the singular, we would have had *antswà i-mɔzɔzɔ*." [190]

Abkhasians regard the elements and manifestations of nature as rational beings. Each of these rational beings has his own gods, whom the orthodox Abkhasian serves honestly, in the light of his understanding. If the name of one, or more, of these gods has been forgotten by the people, he, the god, is simply called *inkhwà*[*]—"his 'part', 'share' of mother," or they use the full form *intswakhwà*—"his part of God," while under the influence of Christianity—*inɔkhakhwà*, in which *akhwà* denotes "part, share, dole" and *anɔkha*—"icon." [2]

In Abkhasian conception, God is One, but He is of infinitely numerous "doles" or parts. Not only each manifestation of nature, but also each tribe, family, or individual, has his own part of God, just as each Christian has his guardian-angel. The Abkhaz says *sɔntswakhwà*—"my (*s-* is the pronominal characteristic of the first person singular) part of God"; *untswakhwà*—"thy (*u-* is the pronominal characteristic of the second person singular) part of God." And it should be noted that one may offend against not only one's own "part of God", but also against "the part of God" of one's neighbour, or relation, etc. . . . [193]

This conception of the Deity as a multiform being appears to account for the fact that the word *antswà* is in the plural. Here I will note that such a conception evidently did not prevail among the Abkhasians only; its traces remain to this day even among the [191]

[1] P. Dcharaia, *On the Relation of the Abkhasian lang. to the Japhetic* (in Russian) in *Materials for Japhetic Linguistics*, St. Pb., 1912, vol. iv, p. 65. 104

[*] The combination "*khw*" represents a sound uttered with one breath impulse. The underlined "*kh*" ("*kh*") constitutes actually a trigraph in which the digraph "*kh*" represents a guttural fricative equivalent to German *ach-laut*, and the *linea subscripta* a hard diffusive glottal spirant, which is not to be identified with the palatal (front) "*h*", and which is represented elsewhere, independently, as "*h*"; the combination "*kh*" (= *kh* + *h*) is thus a deeper guttural, glottal, sound than the German *ach-laut*. The labial semi-vowel "*w*" represents the labialization of the preceding "*kh*". "*Khw*" thus represents a labialized variety of "*kh*". See N. Y. Marr, *The Abkhasian Analytical Alphabet*, pp. 48 and 39; see also his *Abkhasian-Russian Dictionary*, Leningrad, 1926, pp. XXXV–XXXVI. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[2] I. Javakhishvili derives *anɔkha* from the Georgian word *khati*, icon. May not *khati* be derived from the Abkhasian verb *akhat'ara*? *A-khà*, head, *at'ara*, to give, to set, to level the head. Or is it a mere consonance?

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Georgians. Thus, according to Iv. Gv. Gomelauri, the well-known pedagogue, in K'iziqi (Signakh district, in Kakhet'i) they say: *tchemi dsili ghmert'i*; *sheni dsili ghmert'i*, " my part of God," " thy part of God." A. Dsuladze, who is well acquainted with the life of the Gurian people, told me that similar expressions were also used in Guria.

Further, as the reader will see for himself, the word *an*, " mother " constitutes part of the names of a series of gods, and several of these names are of the feminine gender, as Dcharaia has also justly noticed. In this connection I should like to direct the attention of the reader to the names of two gods, namely, *jabrdn* and *zhwabrdn*.* Each of these words has in our opinion several connotations; *jabrdn* is compounded of several words: *j* is the root from the word *a-j-ma*, a goat; *a-b*, father; *r* the pronominal characteristic of the third person plural; and *an*, mother. Thus *jabrdn* denotes " father and mother of goats ", i.e. " (fore)parents of goats ", or " god of goats ". In the same manner *zhwabrdn* is compounded of *a-zhw*, a cow, and of the components just explained, so that the whole denotes " father and mother of cows ", i.e. " (fore)parents of cows ".[1] It seems to me that at the dawning of their religio-philosophical life, the Abkhasians evidently worshipped equally both their male and female ancestors. How strong is this ancestor-worship among the Abkhasians even to-day will be shown in my work *The Ancestor Cult*.

Thus, as is the case of Dcharaia, I think that the word *antswd* is derived from the word *an* in the plural. I also think that the name *antswd*, of the Supreme Being, arose from the deification of ancestors. At first it was evidently used with the plural termination, and in the feminine gender, and later, in the course of time, from " many mothers-gods " arose the One God *antswd*.[2] The changing of the gender of gods is often observed in the religions of the primitive peoples, and *antswd* therefore constitutes no exception.[3]

*Antswd* is One, but He is plural as to His parts. All the gods, of which we will speak below, are subject to and obey Him as the Supreme Being. In the tales, I was told, it is said that *antswd's* mother came from a Megrelian princely *gvari* of Mkheidze, the Abkhasian form of

* The combination *zhw* is to be uttered with one breath impulse; it represents a labialised variety of "*zh*" ( = French "*j*"). Cf. "*tsw*", p. 118, n. *. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] Such a morphological interpretation does not appear admissible, as the word *an*, if in this case it denotes " mother ", is never combined with *ab*, father, but governs the first part of the compound word, *jab* and *zhab*, which, judging from the relative infix *r*, is assumed to be plural. [Note by the Editor, *Khr. V.*]

[2] And not *dntswa*, as it should have sounded and does really sound " mothers ". See above, pp. 118–19. [Ed., *Khris. Vos.*]

[3] If this supposition turns out to be justified, and the word *antswd* is not of Semero-Babylono-Assyrian origin (from *As*, *Asw*), its significance as a term employed in the history of religious beliefs generally will be greatly increased.

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which is *Khetsia*.[1] He has one sister from whom descends the demon family; that is why *antswà* has no right to destroy once for all the demons, his blood relations.

The Abkhasians appear to have made their gods after the image of man; one and the same god can be both good and evil in relation to a given person, according to the zeal with which he fulfils his duties towards him. The only means by which an angered god can be placated is by open-hearted confession and sacrificial offerings. And as the Abkhasians have a great number of gods their whole life is passed in continuous prayer and offering to gods.

## I. ÀYT'AR-NÒHWA*

### 1. *Jabrán*

The Abkhasians make preparations for Shrovetide with particular solemnity, for its approach coincides with the observance of a series of religious rites and offerings, known under the general name of *Àyt'ar-nòhwa*. Àyt'ar is a great god of procreation and fertility, particularly with regard to the breeding of cattle. He is, as we shall see presently, the head of a whole pleiade of gods, who appear to be subordinate to him, and each of whom constitutes a part of him. *Nòhwa*, which is derived from *a-nòhwara*, to pray, denotes praying, prayer, whence *Àyt'ar-nòhwa*, meaning prayer, offering, to Ayt'ar.

The first in order of offerings is that performed in honour of the god *jabrán*, i.e. god of the goats (and sheep) (see above, p. 120).

On the Sunday, the last day of Shrovetide, the eldest woman of the family leavens dough from the flour of *ashò* (Georgian *shvria*, oat)[2] and places it in a warm corner. The dough is often kneaded with a stick, called *adswò*,† made specially for this purpose from the hazel tree, on account of which the dough itself is called *adswərəsa*, a combination of *adswò*, a stick with a tapering end, and *ərsara*, to knead.

On the Shrove Thursday the eldest woman of the family—*ap'hwəs-tsk'ya* ("woman pure")—takes a portion of this leaven, kneads it with the stick, adds some water and flour, boils it, and then bakes maizebread—*amgyal*. This maizebread must be baked on a hearth.

* For the pronunciation of "h" see p. 119, n. *. The combination "hw" represents a labialized variety of "h". [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

† The combination "dsw" which is to be pronounced with one breath impulse, represents a labialized variety of "ds". For this latter sound see p. 329 (ts'). [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] N. Y. MARR, *On the Religious Beliefs of the Abkhasians* (in Russian), in *Khristianskii Vostok*, "The Christian East," St. Pb., 1913, vol. iv, issue 1, p. 138.
(A translation of this work is given in this number, pp. 157–180, see p. 171. Ed. *Georgica*.)

[2] It should be noted that in all these sacrificial offerings oat flour and, on rare occasions, millet flour, is used. Without this flour or unless it is at least used as an ingredient the offering becomes inadmissible. The reason for this is probably because *ashò* (and *ghomi*, millet) alone constituted the staple food.

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When the woman places the dough on the hearth, she holds over it a pure *sulguni* (a round of cheese),[1] from the centre of which she cuts out a small round piece and places it in the middle of the maizebread; with the exception of this middle part, the maizebread is lenten. When placing the dough on the hearth, she scatters bits of it, first in the direction of the sea, and then towards the mountains; and, as if calling to the goats, she says, *reyt, reyt* (the goat call), and mutters the following prayer: "Thou, *jabràn*, the great part of the great god (*Àyt'ar intswakhwədù jabràn*)! Grant us the warmth of thine eyes and of thy heart. Be the guardian of our herds! Bear goodwill unto us so that no harm should befall our herds, except their old moulted wool and old dung!" Apart from this introduction, which is always used, each says an improvised prayer. After this is over, as if calling to the goats they again exclaim, *reyt, reyt*, turning alternatively towards the sea and the mountains.

When the maizebread is baked, and the goats have returned from the fields, the eldest man in the family prays to god *jabràn*, muttering approximately the formula quoted above. The whole family joins him in uttering *dàmon*, and the candles are lighted.

It is to be noted that during the prayer the participants also invoke the "god" *mkyamgaria*,* and say: "May thy bounty never fall short on us." It seems to me that this deity is no other than the "Megrelianized" angels Michael and Gabriel (Geo. *Mik'el da Gabrieli*), with whom Christianity endeavoured, in vain, to replace Àyt'ar and his "parts" of gods; up to this day the pagan deities still take precedence, although they also pray to *mkyamgaria*.

The maizebread is first cut into four parts with two strokes of the knife, and only afterwards into small pieces; the neighbours are not forgotten either, a piece being sent to each. The maizebread is baked in rhododendron (*à-k'wazhwə*)† leaves.

### 2. *Zhwabràn* (god of cows)[3]

This rite is performed in the same manner as jabràn. The prayer begins thus: "Thou *zhwabràn*, the great part (of the great deity)

* The palatal or mid-lingual semi-vowel "*y*" in "*k'y*", "*gy*", as also in "*hy*", "*wy*", "*shy*", "*ry*", etc., met with in this article, lingualizes or iotizes the preceding consonant sound, the combinations "*k'y*", "*gy*", etc, representing lingualized or iotized varieties of "*k'*", "*g*" (pronounced hard, as in "go"), etc. For the pronunciation of simple radical sounds see p. 328. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

† See p. 131, note *.

[1] In Abkhasian *dshyashwə*, pure cheese; cf. Megrelian (I. Kipshidze, *The Megrelo-Russian Dictionary*, s.v. *ənd'uri*) *tsk'ənə*, which is also an Abkhasian expression, denoting "pure (*a-tsk'ya*), good (*à-bəs*)".

[3] In Guria this observance is known under the name of *boslobə* (an abstract form of *bosli*, cowhouse) or *iloroba*; the latter probably has some connection with St. George of Ilori. The Gurians often call a cow *ilora*. In Megrelia the god of cattle-breeding is known as *Zhini-Ant'ar*.

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Àyt'ar!" etc. The dough is kneaded from the same leaven, only when calling to the cows they exclaim *wootsw*. Shrove Saturday is dedicated to *zhwabrdn*.

### 3. *Anàkha-nàhwa* (*Dopu-nàkha*)

Near Adzvibzha is a little village called Dopukət, where dwell the Dopua-s who are attendants (Geo. *mo-khat-ur-i*) of the "icon"—*Dopu-nàkha*, revered by all the Adzvibzhaans and Dopukətans. This "icon" is known also as *zhwəjən-nàkha*, i.e. Sujuna icon, under which is meant, no doubt, St. George of Sujuna in Megrelia. This "icon" is called *zhwardk'yə* by the wives of the Dpua-s, for the reason that the wives of Abkhasians have no right to call by name the eldest members of their husband's *gvari*, or his relations. D. I. Gulia thinks that the word *zhwarak'yə* is the same as the Georgian *zvarakі*, meaning sacrificial animal (the ancient Georgian *zuarakі* = *zowarakі*, Armenian *zowarak*).[1] In honour of this "icon" every Adzvibzhaan and Dopukətan family bakes, on the Shrove Sunday, a cake from millet flour (*sorghum*, in Geo. *ghomi*), which is offered as a gift to it. Prayers are said by the head of each family, and a handful of salt and a piece of wax candle are put aside for the "icon". The eldest of the Dopua goes round the houses and collects the salt and wax.

Mamsər Dopua told us: "At the present time our icon is in the village Sujuna."

### 4. *Àyt'ar-nàhwa* (*khwazhwà-kwà*, in the Bzyb dialect *khwazhw-kwà*)

On the first Monday[2] of the Great Fast the ritual of supplication to Àyt'ar himself is observed. This supplication is otherwise called *khwazhwà-kwà* (in the Bzyb dialect *khwazhw-kwà*). *À-khwazhwà* (Bzyb. *à-khwazhw*) is a special cake, sometimes coniform, and sometimes of round flattened shape. These cakes, which may be stuffed with cheese or not, but on this occasion are lenten, are invariably included in sacrificial offerings of the Abkhasians. They may be boiled, as on this occasion, or baked. *A-kwà* denotes "to hold". After it is called, in Abkhasian, the month of February, *khwazhwəkàn-mzà* (*a-mza*, month, moon). *À-khwazhwə* (Bzyb. *à-khwazhw*) denotes also rhododendron, the leaves of which are indispensable in the making of sacrificial maize-cakes.

[1] As a cult term this word is met with in the form ﺯﻭﺭﻛﻮ in Sabaean (Chwolsohn, *Die Ssabier*, ii, 24, 37, cf. p. 191, n. 179), see N. Marr, *The Baptism of the Armenians, Georgians, Abkhasians and Alans*, etc. (in Russian), in *Zapiski* (Bulletin) of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archæological Society, St. Pb., 1906, vol. xvi, p. 203. (Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

[2] The Megrelians call this Monday *t'ut'ashkha beduieri*, lucky, or happy Monday, lit. the moon-day. With the Abkhasians, too, *Ayt'ar's* day is Monday; they pray to the moon exclusively on Mondays.

sacrificial maize-cakes. Also on this day, in the early evening, are prepared from the above-mentioned leaven many *à-khwazhwə*, and three loaves, made in the shape, respectively, of the moon, the sun, and *alaẖwara*.[1] In the latter are placed as many *ahlakût-s* (little wooden hammers, models of those used in threshing millet, or maize) as there are women in the family and an extra one symbolizing the desire for their increase. This correlation of the number of hammers with the number of women in the family arose, of course, from the fact that the threshing of millet was the woman's job. Soups of phasel and of fresh nettle (*à-khwats*) are also prepared. On this day no edible herb of any kind is allowed to be consumed, or used in cooking; *dsdsəm*, the Abkhasians say, that is, "it is not proper," "it is forbidden" (in Megrelian *vashiners*).

Late in the afternoon, when the cattle have returned from the fields, the prayers begin.

(*a*) *Antswà-ẖwa* (for God).[2]

The whole family gathers together. On the threshold of the house, *dishwa*, is placed a long and narrow table (in Megrelian *tabaki*), on which are laid all the eatables described above. Behind this little table stands the head of the family, and behind him all the other members. The wax candles are lighted. The head of the family takes three *à-khwazhwə*, and, addressing *Antswà*, God, prays that His favours and bounties may be showered upon his family, etc. The family repeat with him, *ăămen*. These cakes are put aside.

(*b*) *Àyt'ar*.

After this the head of the family takes three new *a-khwazhwə*, and says: *Wa, Àyt'ar—bzhwdyt'ar! bzhyə-nɔ̀khak zəndp-yanà, bzhyə—tswəmzdk zzəkədr—dso*, etc., "*O, Àyt'ar—seven Àyt'ar, in the hands of whom are seven icons (to whom are subject seven gods), and to whom are lit seven candles,"—be thou the guardian of our herds! Multiply them so that we may milk seven men's load of milk! Let no harm come to our herd, except the old wool and old dung!* etc. The introduction, given in Abkhasian, is uttered by all, while everybody improvises the rest of the supplication as best they can, repeating the mystic number seven every minute. As is shown by the introduction *Àyt'ar* is the head of a group of seven gods. The number seven appears in many prayers.[3]

[1] *Alaẖwara*—a large mortar (Geo. *ichashuri*) in which millet (*ghomi*) is husked.

[2] *Ikns* is an abbreviated form of the word denoting "he says"; cf. the Russian *govt* heard in the existing colloquial speech.

[3] All this, and the fact that the Abkhasians up to this day still pray to the moon and the sun, makes us wonder whether the septenary *Àyt'ar* is closely connected with the Babylono-Assyrian septenary of gods, particularly as the names of the gods *Aa, Anu—Antsuh*, and *Istar—Àyt'ar*, are very similar, while the moon and the sun are included in both pleiades.

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The Megrelians also know this septenary, *shk'vit'-ul-i*, in honour of which the majority of families let loose a cow with a pierced ear. Her milk is not used for food. The bullock is offered in sacrifice, while the heifer is reared. The well-known Pshav *Kviria* is, perhaps, related to Megrelian Àyt'ar. I have pointed out above that among the Megrelians the god of cattle-breeding is called *Zhini Ant'ar*. *Ant'ar* is the Abkhasian *Àyt'ar*, while *zhini*, in Megrelian, "high," "heavenly," is equivalent to Abkhasian *khikh*. The Abkhasians, however, appear to have split up *Zhini Ant'ar* into two gods, *Àyt'ar* and *Khikh*. They appeal for help to the latter in the spring, when the cattle are taken to the mountain pastures. They pray to him under the shadows of trees. On four pillarets are placed poles, which are covered with leaves of trees, particularly of the wild hazel tree, the oak, or yoke-elm. A cheese curd wrapped in chestnut tree bark is placed on this table (*ashwamkyd'*)* which is covered with greenery; on it is also placed *àtchamak'wa*, a kind of millet porridge, cooked with cheese. In front of it is also placed milk gruel. Women are not allowed to be present. The head of the family, standing with uncovered head in front of this green table, called *ashwamkyd'*, prays that *Khikh*, the great part of the great deity Àyt'ar, may increase his cattle and send all good things. While praying he spills a little of the gruel towards the sea and towards the mountains, uttering *wootsw*. The prayer over, he takes the cheese curd and passes over it cross-wise a hazel "knife", which is really a stick cut into a tapering, knife-like shape, after which he actually cuts the cheese curd with a real knife.[1] This ceremony of prayer is followed by a dinner, the remains of which are not cleared away. Three of the supports or legs of *ashwamkyd'* are cut off (each with one stroke), the fourth remains there untouched. It seems to me probable that the table itself received its name from this act of cutting. Megrelians also know this *ashwamkyd'*, which they call *sumket* (*sumi keti*), "three sticks," derived, perhaps, from *sumkvat'*, in which case it would denote "three cuttings" (*kvat'* < *kvat'ua* = to cut, to fell), i.e. "cut with three strokes."[2]

The Georgian Mountaineers also have their *Anator-i*.

(c) *Alòshkintr* (*alòshkintr*).

These cakes are also put aside. The prayer now takes three new

* The combination *shw* represents a labialized variety of "*sh*"; cf. "*shw*", p. 120, note.*. In *ashwamkyat'* the "*sh*" is not only labialized, but also lingualized or lotised, which lingualization is not, however, represented in the transcription. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] By using the wooden knife, the Abkhasian probably pays tribute to that very ancient time when his ancestors used that kind of knife.

[2] If the first part *shwum* represents the Megrelian word "three", one should keep in mind not the "K'art'lianized" form *sumi*, but the original, Tubal-Kainian *shumi*; see Marr, *From the Journies to Svania* (in Russian), in *Khrist. Vostok*, ii, pp. 17–18. (Editor, *Khrist. Vost.*)

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*d-khwazhw* and entreats god *Alòshkintr* to grant the house faithful dogs—those best friends of man and reliable watchers of his weal; the prayer at the same time spills some of the hot *a-k'warəpà* or *a-k'warpà* (a thick broth of *d-khwazhw*, or millet) towards the sea and some towards the mountains, uttering "*Wootsw!* Burn out the tongue of the evil-speaker, the eyes of the evil-eyed", and continues his prayer. In the opinion of the commission, *Alòshkintr* is also "part" of *Àyt'ar*. *Ala* denotes dog; *shkintr*, however, is incomprehensible.

The commission explained that "dog" was mentioned before "man" on account of the former being more capable of loyalty to a master than the latter.

It should be noted that the common law values the blood of a dog in proportion to that of its owner; the blood of a baron's dog is equal to that of a baron, of a peasant's to that of a peasant, etc.

From the lips of K. Dolbaia (Abkh. Delba), an 80-year-old Abkhasian, who possesses an expert knowledge of the Abkhasian language, I wrote down the following tale:—

"In ancient times, when Abkhasia was inhabited by giants and devas (daevas), Aslan, one of the giants, would not leave the devas in peace. Once, when he was asleep, the devas crept up stealthily, bound him with silk laces, blinded and killed him, and threw him into a pit as deep as a well. On their return from their usual hunting expedition, his dogs discovered their master, but they could not pull him out of the well. They fell upon an ox-cart driver who happened to be passing by, and compelled him to rescue their master from the well and unbind him. The dogs licked Aslan for three days and three nights, and so brought him back to life and restored his sight." [1]

The following superstition prevails among the Abkhasians. If someone, noticing the heavens bursting open, succeeds in uttering *Làri, vàri, khəzò, jkhwàri*, he will have all his wishes fulfilled. Only one woman was honoured with this great good fortune, the widow of a Mukvabba. *Làri* is interpreted as *lala* which denotes dog; *vàri* (*wàri* from *aowyò*,* man) as man; *khəzò* as whey; *jkhwàri* as the crust of millet porridge; uttered together they are supposed to mean "make me rich". My Abkhasian advisers repeatedly emphasized that the dog was mentioned first because of its unexampled loyalty and fidelity to man, his master.

(d) *Àmza-nəkwa*, Prayer to the Moon.

The supplicant takes the moon-shaped cake and says: "Thou,

* See p. 122, note *. According to Marr, the throat participates vigorously in the pro/uction of this composite or diffusive sound, and in a way as if the sound of the guttural "ʁ" (the ancient Arabic '*ain*) were also heard. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] The Academician N. Y. Marr has kindly directed my attention to Moses of Khoren, who describes how by order of Semiramis, the dogs of *Aruiht* (cf. *Alkhinàr*) licked the corpse of *Aru* or *Areia*, the Armenian Prince, in order to revive him.

Àmza, the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, guard over our men! Grant them beauty and strength!" Simultaneously the men-folk crowd around him, for the moon is the god of men; the women-folk stand at a distance. "Increase our cattle and all our weal! Burn out the eyes of the spell-binders, and the tongues of the evil-speakers! *Wootsw, Wootsw!*" the supplicant continues his incantation and, calling to the cattle, spills *k'uarpa* (*a-k'warpà* or *a-k'wrpà*) now in the direction of the sea, now towards the mountains.

"The moon is a man, and the sun is a woman," say the Abkhasians.

I will now quote from my notes the following brief account of a very characteristic Abkhasian tale:

(1) "Seven very rich Abkhasian brothers had no sisters; whereat they were very aggrieved. Eventually, however, a sister was born, but from that moment the wealth of the brothers began to diminish; every night some invisible power drove away their cattle in herds. The youngest brother who was endowed with the gift of prescience (*ashàna*) said to the others: 'A demon has entered our house in the guise of our sister; if we do not kill him, our days and those of all in the whole district are numbered!' The brothers, however, would not listen to him. Thereupon he left his home, and travelled abroad, where he married a beautiful maiden-sun (*Àmra*). After several years, feeling home-sick, he set out to visit his brothers. Alas! what did he find? There was nobody left alive in the whole district except a mouse and his own sister-demon (the witch). She at once devoured his horse, and stepped aside to sharpen her teeth. On the advice of the mouse, the moon-brother, to save his life, took to his heels; he managed to inform his wife-sun of his misfortune, who hastened to deliver him. But the sister overtook her brother and began to devour him. By this time his wife Àmra had arrived. She pulled her husband, *Àmza*, towards her, but the demon pulled also; and so a deadlock ensued. *Anìswà* decided the matter thus: he allowed the wife-sun to have her husband, the moon, for fifteen days, and the demon to have him for the remaining fifteen days of the month. And from that time began the phases of the moon. As soon as the moon becomes full it means that the demon has begun to devour Àmza, on which account the moon diminishes gradually; towards the end of Àmza's life his wife, full of love, comes to the rescue of her unfortunate husband, and as her caresses and care restore him to life the moon waxes again. When it is full the demon reappears and the story repeats itself!"

(2) "The Eclipse of the Moon. During the eclipse a monster, Atv (*Àtwyo*), falls upon the moon to devour it. In order to save their

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539 [789] benefactor, the moon, the Abkhasians fire at the monster and thereby drive him away." [1]

(3) The Moon and the Sun. A beautiful Abkhasian widow woman had a son and a daughter, who often absented themselves from home for the whole day; they would go off early in the morning and return only late in the evening. No amount of coaxing or tenderness on the part of the mother sufficed to keep the children at home or stop them from indulging in their daily adventure, so she decided to shadow them. She found they were seated under the shadow of an ancient oak, in a thick forest, enjoying themselves in an agreeable pastime with the moon and the sun. Before them were all sorts of eatables. The mother, flying into a passion, flung fresh dung at the moon and the sun. The sun-sister, being a more fastidious creature, washed herself, but the less particular moon-brother did not do so, and hence arose the dark patches on the moon; the brother, the moon, and the sister, the sun,[2] then soared up to the sky for ever, while the widow and her children returned home."

821 Here I will also note that the Abkhasians always welcome the new moon by looking at its reflection through a mirror, or over a silver piece.

[753] A certain mainly infantile disease, similar to convulsions, is called by the Abkhasians *dmzakra*, i.e. " to be caught by the moon ".

(*e*) *Àmra-nə̀hwa*, Prayer to the Sun.

1196 [1116] When he has finished the invocation addressed to Àmza (the moon), the supplicant takes the sun-shaped cake, and, with the women surrounding him, he says: " Thou, Àmra, *Àyt'ar intswakhwədə̀*, the great part of the great *Àyt'ar*, grant warmth, and caress the women of our family! Increase our cattle," etc., and then spills *k'warpa* (*a-k'warpə*) in the usual manner, uttering *wootsw*.

According to D. I. Gulia, in the village of Dchilou they use the form *Amera* instead of *Àmra*.

(*f*) *Anàp'a-nàga*.

[1116] After that the supplicant takes *alaĥwdra* (a large mortar) and, addressing himself to the god *Anàp'a-nàga*, says: " Thou, the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, send us the warmth of thine eyes and of

[1] Exactly what *Atèwys* denotes is difficult to explain. In connection with the above quoted tale, the etymology of this word may, however, perhaps elucidate its significance. *Atə̀* denotes the barn- or screech-owl; *wy* may be the root from the word *a-owyə̀* (man); consequently *atèwys* may denote " man-owl ". And by *atèwys* is, perhaps, understood the sister devouring the brother-moon.

[2] Their gender is often confused: sometimes the moon and the sun are sisters or brothers, sometimes the moon is brother and the sun sister.

[3] I think the Georgian word *mizezi*, cause, is derived from the Abkhasian *amèza*, cause (from *àmza*, moon). (It is doubtful! Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

thy heart! Grant us such a crop of maize that at its gathering we shall have to bend the stalks with a hook (Geo. *Kavi*), and cut them down with a bill!" *K'uarpa* (*a-k'wərpà*) is then spilled, and the cattle is called by shouting *wootsw*. *Anàp'a-nàga* is the harvest god. In my opinion the etymology of these words is as follows: *Ap'ard* denotes "to twist or twine" something (a rope, for example), as well as "to pass with difficulty through something", for instance, a maize or millet field, crowd, etc.; *nàgara*—to carry: *inap'do indgo*—carriest thou by forcing thy way, by pushing asunder.

There is also an evil spirit of the harvest called *Jaja*, but we will speak of her (she is a goddess) separately, as she is not a member of this septenary.

(*g*) *Atchshò-shyashydna* (god of horses).

Finally, the supplicant takes the cake whose shape represents a horse (or three *à-khwazhwə*), and entreats (the god) *Atchshò shyashydna* —the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, to increase his horses (donkeys and asses). Again *wootsw* and *ak'warpà*. The word *atchshò* denotes horse; *shwyashydna* or *shashana* is incomprehensible.

With this ceremonial *Àyt'ar-nòhwa* ends.

Judging from what has already been said above, it is clear that *Àyt'ar* is the head of a whole pleiade of gods, each of whom constitute a special part of him; it is noteworthy that in every supplication addressed to any one of these gods, *Àyt'ar* is also invariably referred to as one whose part is the deity in question. The religio-philosophical mind of the Abkhasians has arranged the hierarchy of these gods in the following order:—

ÀYT'AR: JABRÀN, ZHWABRÀN, ALÀSHKINTÈ, ÀMZA, ÀMRA, ANÀP'A-NÀGA; AND ÀTCHSHÒ-SHYASHYÀNA.

*Àyt'ar* is one in seven parts. This conception of God in parts is prominently expressed in *Àyt'ar*.

(*h*) *Lòmilah* (*Nòmirah* or *Shòmirah*).

*Àyt'ar-nòwha* ends with *Lòmilah*. What this word denotes is difficult to explain. It appears to denote the god of conjugal happiness of the youth.

On the same evening, after the conclusion of *Àyt'ar-nòhwa*, the young people, boys and girls, meet at one of their houses, and begin to predict their fortunes. It is a time of laughter and gaiety, and the young people enjoy themselves to their hearts' content. *A-kwakwàr* of usual size is prepared in great quantities; and also enough of a smaller size, extremely salt in flavour, to enable each participant to have three. In one of these small *akwakwàr* is placed a hazel chip, called *dnasp'adsw*, "stake of happiness." Each person is given three

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[196] [187] [574] small salt *akwakwàr*. They then go out into the garden and eat their scones in silence in the dark, at the same time entreating *Làmilaĥ* to bestow upon them a happy married life. Whoever finds the "stake of happiness" in his or her scone must celebrate this stroke of luck by giving a party for all the participants. On the following day the *Làmilaĥ* party is given at the house of the lucky one. After consuming the little *akwakwàr* all go back into the house and sit down to a supper which is also an occasion for gaiety. In order to maintain the feeling of thirst at its strongest, no one is allowed to drink anything. The Abkhasians believe that the thirsty person will be given a drink by the one with whom he or she is fated to share conjugal life. In such manner do the young people of Abkhasia tell their fortunes.[1]

## II. Àmshap'

In this chapter I have collected together all those rites grouped around the festival of Easter, called in Abkhasian *Àmshap'*.[2] The [184] [241] *Àmshap'* celebrations began[3] two weeks before Easter Sunday, and continued for exactly three weeks, during which time custom forbade working in the field, except in the cotton field and the kitchen garden. On Sunday, two weeks before Easter Day, the Abkhasians decorated their houses with the first spring flowers, and this Sunday is called *aioba*, which is derived, probably, from the Megrelian *aia*, violet. [184] [526] Until *aioba*, playing football or other games was forbidden. After that day, however, seasonal games were in full swing. Dressed in their finest attire, the whole population gave themselves up to public sports. Among the most popular pastimes were football, wrestling, stone throwing, trick-riding, dancing, singing, and *akyəbir* (in Geo. *rikiap'ela*, "game of skittles," according to Tchubinashvili's or Tchubinov's Dictionary).

The following Sunday—Palm Sunday—the Abkhasians call *baioba* (a "Megrelianization"). The name is derived from *a-baia*, a [139] yellow flower which grows profusely in the fields of Abkhasia in the early spring.[4] On this day also the Abkhasians decorated their houses with flowers, particularly with *abala*.

[171] [1] *Anasp'a dsw* has its double in Guria and Imeret'i *bedis-kveri*, cracknel of fate, which is known also to the Tiflis Armenians. I think the Pshav *dzadzola* arose on this ground.

[2] It is, in my opinion, a compound word, consisting of *amsh*, day, and *ap'* (*yap'u*), [192] accepted, appointed, fixed; *Àmshap'* thus denotes "pre-ordained day" (Geo. *mighebuli dghe*).

[3] These celebrations are no longer observed; they are traditional, and I am describing them from memory, or from the words of the Commission. [118]

[4] According to Tchubinashvili (Tchubinov), and to R. Erist'avi (Eristov), *baia* is crows-foot, *ranunculus*. Erist'avi, considering the word to be Megrelo-Imero-Gurian, gives as its K'art'(l)ian equivalent *tskhviris-satskhola*. The word *a-baia*, in Abkhasian *a-mərtch*, is, according to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden, the equivalent of the Russian *lyutik iedki*.

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### 1. *Adzərga-khwasha*

Either during the night before *baioba*, or, according to some members of the Commission, on the Wednesday evening of Passion-week, is observed the rite of binding legs with wool threads. Having supped early, the family retires to bed, each individual thrusting out his or her right leg from under the blanket. The eldest woman in the family stands on a stool in the middle of the room, and spins thread from wool. She does her work in silence. Having spun the required quantity, she quietly approaches the beds, and binds with this thread the right leg of each of their occupants, murmuring: "May God grant thee to see such days for a hundred years!" *Adzərga* (more correctly, *adzəga*) denotes a thick thread; *a-khwasha*—Friday, so that this rite was in former days, probably, observed on Fridays. The threads were afterwards burnt on the fire under the small cauldron in which was boiled the meat of the sacrificial animal, on Easter Day.

### 2. *K'wab-gharghar**

As soon as the binding ceremony was finished, the woman seized a copper cauldron, or a copper basin, and struck it like a gong, shouting at the top of her voice: "We have beaten! We have beaten!" The whole family then ran out into the garden, shouting *zhwakk'wat'weyt!* "We have beaten you (outstripped)!" The "beaten" neighbours, annoyed to find themselves "beaten", immediately fell upon them, and a mock battle ensued. The battle was fought, of course, entirely as a joke, and with great merriment. In ancient times, a whole village often went to "battle" against another, beating copper cauldrons and basins. The "battle" was followed by dances and fun-making continuing till the dawn. *A-k'wab* denotes cauldron of copper, *gharghar*, knock, rap, clatter of a copper cauldron or basin.

### 3. *Aqat'wara*

This Abkhasian term denotes the following superstition: an Abkhaz considers it a great misfortune if he hears the warbling or chirping of a swallow or the call of a cuckoo, before he has had his breakfast (or has at any rate partaken of salt); the bird will have "beaten" him, and this he regards as a great misfortune. In order to avoid this he eats salt, or something salt-flavoured immediately on rising from bed, which means that he has won the "contest".[1]

* The labial semi-vowel "w" in "k'w", "t'w", as also in "kw", "tw", etc., met with in this article, labializes the preceding consonant sound, the combination "k'w", "kw", etc., representing labialized varieties of "k'", "k", etc. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] Georgians also have such a superstition.

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### 4. *The Gathering of Medicinal Herbs*

On Maundy Thursday, young maidens, led by old women, go into a forest early before the dawn, to gather medicinal herbs. They must neither converse nor look back. When they dig out the herb, they throw salt into the soil, murmuring "*Àdgilə-dedop'al, bəkhwə bdl'eyt*, the Queen-Earth, we have returned to thee thy share". The following herbs are considered as particularly healing: (*a*) *ajmshyə-rshwəga, Arum albispatum*,[1] literally denoting: *ajmshyə*, eyebrow; *ashwəga*, "that with which they paint (a paint)"; it is used against diphtheria and scarlet fever; (*b*) *aztqyil* or *abgar ləmha, Aristolochia pontica*[1] (birthwort); the second Abkhasian term denotes, literally, "jackal's ear," used against erysipelas (St. Anthony's fire); and (*c*) *ajaqwa*, veratrum, according to Tchubinov (Geo. *Kharis-dziva*). Having finished gathering, they return home in silence and without looking back.

Maundy Thursday is called by the Abkhasians *tchatchkhadəl*, derived, in all probability, from the Megrelian *tsashkha didi*, "the great Thursday."

### 5. *Jaja*[2]

On Maundy Thursday the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice to the goddess of fruitfulness (of husbandry and horticulture) called *Jaja*. For this occasion the Abkhasian women prepare all sorts of lenten dishes, taking care always to include a pumpkin. The dishes are placed outside the house, in a corn-field, the offering to *Jaja* being accompanied by a supplication as follows: "The great *Jaja*! We have done all that was required of us, and have made the customary offering. We therefore humbly entreat thee to show thy bounty towards us and grant us a good harvest in the field and in the kitchen garden!" As I have stated before, the Abkhasians have no set prayer formulas, and each prays as best he can.

As always, the offering is left for a few minutes wherever it was placed, and the supplicants stand before it, and watch with emotion how the spirit of the goddess invisibly satiates herself with the gifts of men! Needless to say they themselves consume the "remains".

As I have already remarked, there are two Abkhasian gods of fruitfulness: the god *Andə'a-nəga* and the goddess *Jaja*.[3] *Jaja*, as imagined by an Abkhaz, is a broad-shouldered woman, of small stature. More than once Abkhasians have seen her wandering about the fields

[1] According to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden.

[2] It is of interest to elucidate what relation *Jaja* holds to Georgian *jojoba*; see I. Javakhishvili, *A History of the Georgian Nation* (in Georgian), p. 135.

[3] The relation of these two gods is difficult to determine; nor do we know the relation of *Jaja* to *Ayi'er*.

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belonging to those who have failed to propitiate her, and muttering: [796] [241]
"Corncobs (of Indian corn) of a digit size, corncobs of a digit size!" But if the owner of the field succeeds in frightening her and making her say *ràki, dzakə, ràki dzakə*, "of a cubit size," he will have a magnificent harvest.

On the day of *tchatchkhadə̀l*, after the offering has been made to *Jaja*, the seeds are taken for the first time into the kitchen garden.

### 6. *Àmshap'*

Easter Day is celebrated with great solemnity by all the [796] Abkhasians. It must be noted that the Abkhasians to-day have no notion whatever of the Christian conception of this day. Even the greeting, "Christ is risen," usual on this day, is wanting in the Abkhasian language. Everyone able to afford it has a new dress made for this day. To emphasize the poverty of a person the Abkhaz says, "Even for *Àmshap'* he could not get himself new clothes." This is almost the only day when an Abkhaz considers it necessary to send to church at least one of the members of his family. And the service in the church begins early enough to enable it to be finished by sun- [782] rise. Everyone is in haste to be the first to light a wax candle and to [769] place a painted egg on the graves of their dead. The Muhammadan Abkhasians also follow this custom, although they do not light the candles. It is known that Abkhasians bury their dead near their [764] homes, in the places favoured by the deceased, and the graves, therefore, are scattered about the village. Owing to this custom the whole village is illuminated on this day of *Àmshap'*.

On this day each family must slaughter some animal. And those [782] of the Abkhasians who follow the established custom of Paschal offerings, immolate two or three animals according to what his obligation is, what he "owes"—this word denotes "obliged", "must", "owes".

(*a*) *Aniswakhwə̀* (or *Aniswakhwa*).

This is a compound word, consisting of *Aniswə̀*, God, and (*a*)-*khwə̀*, part, share, and denoting "share of God", "for God", more exactly "to render to God that which is due to Him", briefly "praying to God". On this day most of the Abkhasians reverently offer up their prayers to God; but not all of them. There are families who are "not obliged" to render to God "His share". I have already mentioned [776] that the Abkhasian makes offerings only to those gods under whose power his parents or he himself had come, and thus had become his tributary, so to speak. Very often separate members of a family have, in addition to the general family guardian-gods, their own personal

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guardians, whose power extends to his descendants, but not to those of his brothers or sisters. In the village of Adzvibzha almost everyone is obliged to carry out this " praying to God ", Christians as well as Muhammadans.

Every Abkhaz keeps in his cellar, in honour of " God ", a special pitcher filled with must of the very best grade. However great his need, an Abkhaz will not, for any consideration in the world, open this " sacrificial " pitcher until the celebration of the cult of " praying to God ".[1] Early in the morning, on returning from the church, the head of the family surrounded by the male members of his household, sacrifices a young he-goat over the " sacrificial " pitcher, and entreats " the great God to receive graciously the humble offering made by him in accordance with the instructions of his forefathers . . ." He humbly entreats the Great God " punish us not for our faults and trespasses ", etc. After this the meat of the immolated goat is boiled, and sacrificial wheat-cakes are baked. All this is taken down into the cellar, and placed in front of the sacrificial pitcher. The members of the family kneel down, while the head of the family reverently cleans and opens the pitcher, and, holding in his left hand a hazel stick upon which the heart and liver of the goat are transfixed, he prays *Antwsa-du* (to great God) that He grant him and his family a long and happy life. In his prayer he never fails to mention that they are performing the rite " in the manner they were taught by their fathers and grandfathers ". Afterwards he fills a glass with wine from the pitcher and pours it on the heart and liver and the sacrificial cakes; he then passes the latter, with the wine, three times over the heads of the supplicants who are kneeling down, and says: " Grant us the warmth of Thine eyes and of Thine heart! Protect us from all infirmities and sickness." Then follows again the libation of wine Now they all rise, turn round from right to left, and each places a piece of frankincense on burning coals. For a few minutes they all stand still humbly, while the great God " receives " their offerings, and then, with strict observation of order of seniority, a glass of wine and a small piece of the heart and liver is given to each of the participants. It should be noted that only the household members are allowed to partake of these sacrificial offerings. Even the married daughters of the family are treated as strangers, and they are not allowed to share in the offerings with their husbands and children. It is sinful even to think of the sale of the wine. In most of the families the female sex is generally forbidden to partake of this offering.

Thus do the Abkhasians perform annually the domestic offering to God of " His share ". But every three to five years each Abkhas

[1] The same applies to other " sacrificial pitchers " referred to below.

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is obliged to present "His share" (offering) to God, in a forest, for which purpose a clearing is chosen under the shadow of a tree, oak or yoke-elm. Here is offered usually a castrated goat the age of which is equal to the number of years since the Abkhaz last prayed in the forest. Women are not allowed to take part in this rite, although they help to prepare the sacrificial cakes. The prayer is said by the elder of the *gvari*, who receives the hide of the immolated animal. The offering takes place in front of *ashwamkyát'* (described above). The prayer ceremonial is the same as in the case of the domestic offering, although the pitcher of wine kept in the cellar is not used; for the purpose of the oblation a little wine is brought in a smaller pitcher. All the men in the neighbourhood participate in the ceremony, and when it is over they seat themselves on the grass; herbage is placed in front of them, and on this is served the dinner. A small piece of the heart and liver of the immolated animal is given to each of the participants. All the sacrificial food must be consumed on the spot; nothing may be taken home. The horns of the victim are hung high above the *ashwamkyát'* and left there. Three legs of *ashwamkyát'* are then cut, and the assembly disperses.

Some families dedicate to *Antswakhwò* cows which are let loose with perforated ears (see above, p. 125); these cows are called *adzatwò*, which is difficult to translate; it apparently denotes "pledge", "security". Bullocks born of these cows are offered in sacrifice in place of castrated goats.

(*b*) *Aylòr-nòkha.*

On the same day, simultaneously with *Antswakhwò*, a sacrifice is offered to *Aylòr-nòkha* (*Ilòr-nòkha*). The ceremony of offering the sacrifice is exactly similar to that described above. There is the same "wine pitcher", goat, cakes, and the same manner of praying. Also, at certain intervals, the sacrifice is made in the woods, in the manner described above. Many keep *adzatw* cows in honour of the Ilori icon. The only difference being that women have a freer access to these offerings than to *Antswakhwò*. Here I will note that if the pitcher for the "sacrificial wine" becomes in any way damaged (even if only slightly chipped), a new one, larger and dearer, must be substituted without fail. This is a general rule for all pitchers of this kind.

*Aylòr-nòkha* (*Ilòr-nòkha*) denotes the "icon of Ilori". This appears to be the same icon of St. George, which is kept in the small, walled-in church of the village of Ilori. This village is situated on the seashore, three miles from Otchemtchire. What is this Ilori icon? Which saint does it represent? For what is this saint remarkable? The contemporary Abkhaz has no notion whatever. The masses do not know to this day that it is the image of St. George. All they know

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778 is that the Ilori "icon" is omnipotent, and they, therefore, try hard not to incur its wrath. It is inflexibly just and punishes harshly those who deviate from the law; it is a goddess of equity, as it were; a 778 kind of Themis, and in the practical life of the southern Abkhasians 629 and of the Samurzaqanoans, there is, therefore, no "saint", no 690 "icon", no deity equal to the Ilori "icon"; it determines finally and irrevocably all matters, whether civil or criminal, which the crown court has not been able to settle to the satisfaction of the popular idea of fair play. Even in the case of matters upon which judgment has been passed by crown courts, but where the decision has not satisfied the disputing parties, appeal is made to its tribunal. The trial is conducted as follows: A kind of arbitration court is set up which imposes upon 782 the accused the obligation to take a propitiatory oath before the Ilori "icon". If the matter is unimportant it is determined by a village tribunal which provides one or two co-swearers; but if the matter is serious (insult to one's honour, murder, etc.) the representatives of the parties participate in the trial with the judges. "Swearing in" follows, but the number of co-swearers increases; thus, for instance, 1–2 *t'avadi-s*, 2–3 *aznauri-s*, 5–6 peasants, 1–2 namesakes, 1–2 maternal relations, 1–2 relations of the female line of the *gvari*, etc., are frequently appointed as co-swearers. The oath is administered on *Wednesdays* and *Fridays*. The accused swears before the icon that he is innocent, the co-swearers confirm his declaration, and there the matter ends. If the accused is unable to take the oath, he submits obediently to the punishment imposed upon him. From the day of the taking of the oath onwards the plaintiff breaks off all relationship with the defendant and his co-swearers. "The icon is between us (parts, separates us)," says the orthodox Abkhaz. It is impossible to evade this custom; it is an Abkhasian's profound conviction that infringement of this custom (the re-establishment of relationship), as also 696 a false oath, will not pass unpunished; the "icon" punishes with 653 sickness and even with death, if the accused does not come to his senses in time and confess himself in the wrong. At the death of all the members of the guilty family, the wrath of the "icon" recoils on the plaintiff. To avert the chastisement of the "icon", as of Abkhasian gods in general, the guilty person must pray and make offerings to the "icon"; he must also compensate his opponent's material losses and obtain the latter's consent thereto; they both set out for Ilori with gifts, prescribed by sorceresses, and they pray there to the "icon" for forgiveness of their sins; they bring goats, bullocks, and money. This is called the reciprocal forgiveness-prayer (*cyba-nǯ̌wara*). From this day normal relations are restored between the parties. If one of the parties does not agree to make peace, the other party can *akhs-dchekhǯ̌ra*, "buy back his head," i.e. redeem

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himself, by placing before the "icon" also the amount he was to pay to the opponent.

Muhammadans also take the propitiatory oath at Ilori, together with the Christians.[1]

There are many stories current about the power of the Ilori "icon" to work miracles. I learned one of them from the lips of Biram Tkhazou and Seyt Zhania.

"In ancient times the Ilori 'icon' determined all the disputes of human mortals in the following manner. High up in the centre of the church, hung the golden scales of Justice. Under these scales stood the suitors, praying zealously to the Ilori 'icon', who inclined the scale over the head of the righteous. Knowing this, Abkhasians would not venture to break the law or wrong one another; peace and happiness reigned upon the earth. But men are cunning; an impious Abkhaz decided to deceive the great Ilori 'icon'. He owed a neighbour of his a hundred *manat'i* (= rubles) which he would not pay. The creditor complained. They both went to Ilori. When they appeared before the 'icon', the debtor handed to his creditor his staff which contained the hundred *manat'i*. The scale inclined towards the creditor, thus acquitting him of the charge. He took back his staff and left the church. The Ilori 'icon' was 'offended' and because of this fraudulence on the part of one Abkhaz it punished the entire people: the 'icon' took the scales of Justice to heaven for ever."

In ancient times the Ilori "icon" provided oxen for itself on the eve of the wake festival. The Commission assured me that eye-witnesses of this miracle were still living in Abkhasia, but none knew their names. As this providing of the oxen is described by A. Lamberti in the manner in which the Abkhasians relate it to-day, I will quote the description from his work.[2]

"On November 20th[3] they celebrate St. George's Day. A superstition prevails among the people that this celebrated martyr, on this day, procures for himself an ox from the neighbourhood and brings it by night into the Ilori Church dedicated to him. This church is held in great esteem, not only by all the Megrels, but by the neighbouring peoples also. Therefore it is very rich in gold and silver[4]—the icons are all made of these metals and are adorned, too, with precious stones; and even the doors are mounted in thick sheets of silver. So revered is this church by all the people, that, although situated

[1] In Northern Abkhasia *Dsdsvap'sh* is endowed with a similar power.

[2] A. Lamberti lived as a missionary for eighteen years in Megrelia (1635–1653), and, according to him (and also to other sources), the present-day southern Abkhasia (Abahua) constituted then part of Megrelia, the northern boundary being the River Kodor.

[3] The 10th of our (old) style.—N. J.

[4] At the present time, too, it is the wealthiest and the most influential of all the churches of Abkhasia.—N. J.

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[189] [539] [1198] in a distant country place and near the sea-coast, thieves have never entered there, nor has any enemy ship raided it or despoiled it of its wealth. Indeed, so highly is this saint (the Ilori 'icon') honoured, that not only would the valuable contents of the church not be stolen, but, even if precious stones were scattered *outside* the church, in its vicinity, no one would touch them. (It is the same even to-day, N.J.) In addition to the local population, this saint is also feared by the Abkhazes,[1] and even by the Turks, deprived though they are of the light of Christian religion. They all worship, and fear, this sacred object (the 'icon', N.J.) . . .

" On November 20th, the Prince (of Megrelia, N.J.) goes to the Ilori Church accompanied by his court officials, nobles, and the people of Odishi (i.e. Megrelia), to participate in the feast of the 'ox'. Not only do the Odishians go there on that day, but also the Abkhazes and Svans, in great numbers. The church is enclosed in stone walls [346] about the height of fifteen spans. At its entrance are large gates surmounted by a beautiful campanile containing many bells. On the eve of the feast, in the dusk of the evening, the Prince, accompanied by a large retinue of bishops, princes, and nobles, rides up to these gates, orders them to be locked, then seals the keyhole with his own seal and returns home. The following morning, before dawn, the Prince, accompanied by the same retinue, again rides up to the gates. When they have assured themselves that the seal has not been tampered with, the Prince removes the seal and opens the gates. Within the Church walls, the ox is found. At the sight of this miracle, the people, with great fervour, offer up their thanks to St. George, and the church bells ring out the glad tidings of the miracle all over the country-side. Everyone is firmly convinced that St. George himself provided the ox and led it with his own hands into the enclosure. Also, it is said, the saint leads the ox thrice from the mountains to the sea and back, and offers the ox, thus sanctified, to the people as a gift . . .

" A long time ago, so it is said, an unbeliever (the Abkhazes say that he was a Muslim from Trebizond, N.J.) came here from a country many hundreds of miles away from Odishi. After witnessing the miracle and how the people celebrated the occasion, this obstinate man not only disbelieved, but began to mock the Christians, telling them that they were light-minded and foolish enough to believe anything. In spite of his attitude, the people tried to persuade him to embrace the true Faith of Christ, and unanimously affirmed that all the miracles of St. George were really true. 'Very well, then,' said he, 'I will do this. At my home, two hundred miles away, I have an

[1] In Ilori the Megrelian language prevails to this day; many, however, know Abkhasian also.—N.J.

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ox of a certain colour. If the miracles you talk so much about are true, it should be an easy matter for St. George to bring my ox into this church to-night; then, certainly, I will gladly embrace your Faith.' The condition was accepted. On the following morning, early, on opening the gates, there was found within the enclosure an ox which the unbeliever recognized as his own. Thus he was convinced of his error, and embraced the Christian Faith."[1]

(c) *Indl-qwùba.*

The *T'avadi*-s Marshania, and all those Abkhasians who descended from the mountains (Dsabalaa, Dalaa, Pskhvu, etc.), offer sacrifices (a ram, without fail) in exactly the same manner to a sanctity, *Indl-qwùba*, instead of to the Ilori " icon ". I could obtain no information of any kind about this " icon ". Everybody I questioned gave the same answer: *Indl-qwùba* is equal in power to *Dodòrəp'sh* and the Ilori " icon ".

These offerings are performed early in the morning, and serve as breakfasts. Every Abkhaz slaughters some animal for the meal (the favourite one is a castrated goat), it is often prepared on the Saturday. They also pay the customary Paschal visits. After the midday sacrificial meal they all go to the public square, where they indulge in games, chiefly football. During Easter week they also organize horse racing, the most popular sport of the Abkhasians.

### 7. *The Second Day of Easter*

This is a commemoration day. A variety of dishes are prepared, all of which are placed on a table by an open window. The eldest of the family, holding a candle and a glass of wine in his hands, prays to the souls of deceased relatives that they grant his family peace and happiness. Then follows the pouring of wine on the meat and wheat dishes. The whole family stand behind the supplicant. After the prayer each member approaches, places a piece of frankincense on burning embers, and pours wine on the food. Here stands too a smoking pipe. All remain seated in silence, in order that the souls of the deceased ancestors may eat in peace.[2]

The Abkhasian, as has already been stated, have no Paschal greeting such as " Christ is risen ". They welcome each other with a kiss, saying: " May God grant us that we meet again next year," to which the other replies: " And for a hundred years."

[1] Quoted from the Russian and Georgian translation of A. Lamberti's *Relatione della Colchide hoggi detta Mengrelia nella quale si tratta dell'Origine, costumi e Costumi naturali di quei Paesi.* Published in Naples, 1654.

[2] This rite will be described in detail in my work *The Cult of the Ancestors.*

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## 8. *Thursday of Easter Week*

### (*dsatchə̀khur, mardydni t'argyalàz*)

796 On the Thursday of Easter week the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice [796] to *dsatchə̀khur, mardydni t'argyalàz*. I do not know what the first word denotes. *Mardydni* is the Megrelian *mardiani* (Geo. *madliani*) and denotes "beneficent", "blessed", "abundant"; while *t'argyalàz* is derived from the Georgian word *mt'avar-angelozi*, archangel; it is not clear, however, which of the archangels is meant. According to the explanation of the Commission, this "icon" punishes the offending family by causing the death, in particular, of children. "If there are children in the family, it does not touch the adults," commented the Commission. Sacrifice to this "icon" is always offered by an oak tree. On the Thursday, early in the morning, sacrificial cakes are baked, and the whole family repair to their oak, which is usually situated nearby within the enclosure. Everybody kneels, [780] facing eastward, and the head of the family makes a bloodless offering consisting of *akwakwàr* and cakes, and entreats the great Dsatchkhur, the beneficent T'argialaz, to forgive them their trespasses, voluntary or involuntary. *Àämen* say the whole family. The oak tree is decorated [794] with pieces of many coloured stuffs, some fastened with nails and [778] some with wax. This oak is sacred and to fell, damage, or defile it is strictly forbidden.

On the same day, in the evening, but this time at home, the family [780] make a blood offering to *T'argyalàz*. A fattened capon is immolated and cakes are again baked. Some families keep pitchers with "sacrificial wine" in his honour.

"In ancient times when people were not so depraved, T'argialaz [789] procured for the day of offering a wild he-goat as his victim," Osman Kamkia informed me, "just as the Ilori 'icon' procured an ox. Now he no longer does so, for we are not worthy of his favours!" concluded the old man, sighing. The peasants Kamkia are *me-khat-ur-n-i* (Geo.), i.e. "attendants of the 'icon'." They keep a little cottage (*p'atskha*) [778] where the "god" is supposed to dwell invisibly. A money-box is kept in the cottage, into which the faithful drop copper coins used exclusively for the purchase of sacrificial offerings.

An old Megrelian, whose name has unfortunately become effaced in my note-book, told me the following:—

778 "The all-powerful and miraculous icon, Dsatchkhur, was removed 789 by the Svans from the Salkhino church, and taken to Svanet'i, where it remained for a long time; in the end, however, moved by pity for the Megrelians, the icon returned of its own accord and alighted on an oak which stands on the picturesque hill of Salkhino. Near this

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oak the Megrelians built a church in its honour, in which this icon rests to this day. It has not forgotten the Svans whom it often visits." My Megrelian informant is an inhabitant of Salkhino.

### 9. *Àhwza-rəmshap'*

Abkhasians call the first Sunday after Easter Low Sunday, *Àhwza-rəmshap'*, i.e. Pascha for women. This day is set apart for public games. Early in the morning everybody assembles in the public square where they indulge in all sorts of sport, chiefly, however, horse racing and tournaments. Next day the Abkhasians go back to work, and ordinary life is resumed.

The public games (on holidays) are continued till Whit Monday.

### 10. *Àdsyla-nəhwa*

In connection with *Àmshap'* mention may be made of two supplications, *Àdsyla-nəhwa* (cf. III (*d*)) and "*Supplication of the Leybaa*". I have not been lucky enough to have witnessed the latter ceremony, which, by the way, belongs to a cult of the Bzib Abkhasians.[1] The worship of the tree, so picturesquely described by ancient writers, such as Strabo, Procopius of Cæsarea, is preserved in a most conspicuous form with its sacred grove, in this supplication of the Leybaa *guari*, as is also the name of the deity, in that of *Àdsyla-nəhwa*; *Àdsyla* denotes tree, *nəhwa* (*anəhwara*), praying, supplication. The deity of the tree itself is called *Àdsyla-intswakhwə*, wherein the latter part denotes "his (of the male rational being) part of god, deity". The Abkhasians in their religion personify and "intellectualize" all manifestations of life, and they strictly distinguish the gender of each of them.

In order to protect wanton children who roam about without restraint, and love to climb trees, the Abkhasians make offerings to the "spirit of the tree", entreating the "great part of the deity of the tree" to guard their children against falling off trees and hurting themselves. The objects offered are capon and cakes. The oak (*a-j*) they consider as the sacred tree, to which they make the offering; walnut-trees (particularly the hazel-nut-tree) and yoke-elms are "pure" trees. If someone falls from the tree they must dig up some coal from under the spot where the person fell; if no coal is found, the accident is regarded as serious; and the person will not survive the fall. An offering is also made to the "spirit of the tree" in the case of certain illnesses, as directed by sorceresses, the sick person being supposed to have fallen ill through having incurred the wrath of the spirit.

[1] About this see the article by N. Pateyna, in the *Collection of the Transcaucasian Mission* (in Russian), 1912, pp. 107–112, 124–7.

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*Notes and Considerations concerning Chapter II*

1796 It is of great interest to determine which pagan cult approximates, under the name of *Àmshap'*, to Easter, the day of the Resurrection of Christ. I. Javakhishvili states in his well-known *History of the Georgian Nation* (in Georgian) that, according to Dubrovin, the Abkhasians called *Àmshap'* also *Mizitkhu*. In my opinion this is another form of the Abkhasian word *məzəkhwə̀*, i.e. " part of the moon," derived from *ànəza*, moon, and *a-khwə̀*, dole, part, share. If this supposition is correct, *məzəkhwə̀* would denote " to give to the moon its share, part ", i.e. " praying to the moon." [1] It should be noted, however, that neither the members of the Commission nor anyone whom I questioned knew anything about this name of *Àmshap'*. It is to be assumed that this name was noted down from the lips of the Mountaineers among whom it had evidently been preserved. In further support of the possible close connection between *Àmshap'* [1916] and the moon cult (and the " tree spirit ") there is also the fact that the most important role in these festivals is assigned to St. George of Ilori, to which saint, as Javakhishvili has proved in his aforementioned work, is assimilated the moon cult. The procuring by this saint of a bullock, its " purification " by leading it three times from the mountains to the sea and back, the dedication to him of the cow *adzàtwə̀*, and, finally, the Gurian name of *zhwabrən*, *Iloroba*, prove that St. George is closely connected with the Abkhasian pleiade. Here is yet another curious fact. In the village of Bandza there is a church dedicated to St. George and called Shourkari. There still exists here the following custom : On the Monday [2] following Low Sunday, after the domestic offering, the populace repair to the church, and on their way, singing *Kyrie eleison*, they uproot a tree without the use of any implement, carry it three times around the wall enclosing the church, and offer it to St. George. The tree is then left within the church enclosure until the next year when it is replaced by a fresh one. This, in my opinion, symbolizes the victory of St. George over the moon (= *t'ut'a* in Megrelian, and over the " tree ").[3] Such a custom also [1917] prevails in the village Opshkvit'i, in Lower Imeret'i, where on the 23rd April the populace offers, in the same manner as at Bandza, a tree to St. George.[4]

1796 Judging from the description of *The Supplication of the Leybaa*, 1911 by the priest N. Pateyna, which has been preserved in its purest state,

[113] [1] Cf. N. Y. Marr, *On the Religious Beliefs of the Abkhasians*, p. 133 (or its translation in this Journal, pp. 178–6.)

[2] " Monday " in Megrelian is *t'ut'askhàs*, that is, the day of the moon (I. Kipshidze, op. cit., s.v. *dghe*). Noteworthy is Lamberti's description of the fear of the moon by the Megrelians.

[3] According to the information given me by Sh. P'aghava and El. Ot'khmezuri.

[4] *O-pshkvit'-i*, judging from its form, is of Megrelian origin.

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Wednesday was the day of the prayer to the tree spirit, with both the Abkhasians and the K'art'vels (and Megrels),[1] which is partly confirmed by the Megrelian name of this day, i.e. *jumashkha*; the latter consists of *juma* and *shkha* (Geo. *dghe*). What does the first component word denote? May it not be derived from the Abkhasian word *ajəma*, she-goat? The Pshavs have preserved the more salient *jumaghis jvari*, wherein *jumaghi* = *ajəmagh* denoting "goat-seed, goat-male", he-goat. This term may have been obtained from the custom of the Abkhasians of dedicating, or offering, exclusively, a goat to the tree spirit. This supposition finds further confirmation in the legend of Dsatchkhur, which procured exclusively for its festivals the wild goat (male).

One may also note the concordance between the names of some days in the Megrelian language, and the fact that it is just on these days that the cult is observed of those gods to whom these days are dedicated. Thus on the Monday (*t'ut'ashkha*) the Abkhasians offer a sacrifice to the moon; on the Wednesday (*jumashkha*) they observe the cult of the tree, and on the Tuesday (*t'akhashkha*) the cult of the mother-earth.[2]

## III. Nàn-ĥwa

The Abkhasians call the day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin (15th August) (*a*) *Nàn-ĥwa*.[3] They observe with great reverence both *Nàn-ĥwa* and the Lent of the Assumption. With *Nàn-ĥwa* are connected the following superstitions of the Abkhasians:—

### (*a*) *Àwyəst'ăd-lòkhəra* (Meg. *Dchindchat'oba*)

Abkhasians associate the night before the 1st August with increased activity on the part of evil spirits *àwyəst'ăd*, demons; and

[1] N. Janashia evidently here uses *k'art'vel* as a generic term, including Megrels, but etymologically and linguistically such use of the term is definitely inadmissible. (Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

[2] The last two comparisons are made by the author, because for *jumashkha* he had also another etymology in connection with the Abkhasian *a-j*, oak, with which he identifies the Megrelian *je*, tree; while in the first part (*t'akha-*) of the word *t'akhashkha*, he saw the Megrelian *dikha*, earth, soil. These doubtful etymologies have been eliminated. On the other hand, cf. *nertchi*, in I. Kipshidze's *Grammar of the Megrelian Language*, s.v., where this term is interpreted as "the basis of something, or the ground on which a house stands", and since the prayer dedicated to *nertchi*, or "master, lord" *nertchi*, as to a kind of deity, cannot be performed in a house with a wooden floor, I. Kipshidze concluded "that *nertchi* is god of the earth", in which supposition he was to a certain extent supported by definitions of the same word, given by lexicographers (S. S. Orbeliani: "the external side of the bottom"; Tchubinov (I): "bottom, the lower part of a vessel"; Tchub (II): "the lower part of the vessel, of the pitcher"). These materials N. Janashia supplements in his letter, dated 16th April, thus: "In Imeret'i *nertchi* denotes ceiling (see also V. Beridze, *Sitqvishona*, The Dictionary, s.v.), while in Megrelia, on the other hand, the rite is known under the name of *p'udoshi do nertchish khvama*, 'the praying of the foundation and ceiling' if not 'of the floor'." (Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

[3] In my opinion *Nan(an)* denotes mother, and *ĥwa*, "says" (from *ahwara*, see above, p. 124, note 2), that is, "for the mother," "the mother's day."

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they, therefore, take precautionary measures to avoid becoming victims of the malignant will of the evil spirits. Nothing is left outside the house, or in the courtyard; nobody sleeps out of doors. To safeguard themselves from evil spirits, the superstitious attach pieces of wax to their hair. Crosses are made from *a-lakẁmha* (Geo. *lekumkha*),[1] to which are appended acanthus leaves, and these are placed at the courtyard gates, house doors, the gates of the kitchen gardens and cornfields, the poultry and cow-houses, etc. Acanthus leaves are hung around the necks of the domestic animals. The Abkhaz is convinced that *dwyəst'aă* dare not approach these crosses, which are also a protection against evil eyes.

During this night the evil spirits go out to look for booty, under the leadership of their mother, *Arapàp* (Meg. *rokapi*). On this expedition they are joined by human beings in whom evil spirits have taken their abode. Some of these evil spirits ride wolves or cats, and devour all the animals left outside by their owners who had no time, or had forgotten to drive them into shelter.[2] All evil spirits without exception stir abroad during this night; they wander growling from village to village and through the forests. For this reason it is easy to find out and catch them, and with this object youths go into the woods, where they make a large fire, using the wood of *a-lakẁmha*. The youngsters hide behind the bushes and watch out to see if they can recognize those of their neighbours into whom an evil spirit has entered. It is believed that the demons never pass a bonfire without stopping and warming themselves a little by it. Often quarrels arise on this ground, with unpleasant consequences. This custom of seeking after the evil spirits, "demons," is called *Awyəst'aă lbkhəra*, which denotes "the catching of the demon"; it is also known under the Megrelian name of *dchindchat'oba*. To this day an Abkhaz believes that an evil spirit can enter into, and remain in, a human body, particularly in that of an old woman.

The chief *dwyəst'aă* is the eldest son of the sister of God, and that is why He, being a blood relation, cannot destroy him, although he may frighten him off with thunder. Here it will be appropriate to quote the following popular story:—

"At the time of the partition of the work between God and the devil, the former, exercising the right of seniority,[3] suggested to the devil that they should divide the world between them. The latter

[1] The Russian *krushina*, according to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden, that is, *alaternus* (R. Eristov mentions the plant *lekukha*, but he does not explain it. Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*).

[2] To safeguard an animal from wild beasts when he strays in the forest, they "bind the mouth" of the wild animals as follows: a pair of scissors is tied and a suitable prayer is uttered. "A sure remedy."

[3] The younger divides, and the elder chooses.

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agreed. During the night God caused the earth to be covered with luxuriant vegetation. Captivated by the beauty of vegetation the devil suggested to God that the best way to divide the world between them would be for one to have the earth and the other the vegetation. God took as his share the earth, and the devil received the vegetation. God then ordered him to remove his vegetation immediately. Only now did the devil realize his mistake, which, however, he rectified thus: he restored the vegetation to God, and in return for it he begged and obtained from Him the right to the souls of those who fall from the trees, having climbed them without first praying to God for their safety. . . ."

### (b) *Barbanjia* (*dchiakohona*)

Before sunset on the 14th August the Abkhasian youths light, in their respective courtyards, a fire of flax straw (at present, owing to the lack of this straw, they use dry fern, etc.). Each person leaps thrice through the flame of this fire, shouting "I have burnt the evil spirit; I have burnt the evil spirit". By so leaping through the flame an Abkhaz "purifies" himself of the evil spirit. After they have leapt three times through the flame each throws a piece of salt into the burning fire, and then, altogether, they begin to beat the fire with sticks to extinguish it, at the same time shouting the above quoted words. At the conclusion of the whole operation, the neighbours inform each other of their victory over the evil spirit by firing a gun. This manner of destroying the evil spirits is called "the burning of the demon" or *Barbanjia*. The denotation of the word is incomprehensible to me.[1]

### (c) *Nǎn-ĥwa*

On the day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, the "pure" (eldest) woman in the family prepares *a-tcha* ("a round bread stuffed with cheese"), boils a cock, and leads the whole family into the kitchen garden. Here they all kneel in front of the blossoming cucumber vine, and the eldest woman makes offering to Nan, saying: "the great Nan (*Nǎn-du*)! We who offer thee this sacrifice, established by our ancestors, humbly entreat thee to have mercy upon our house: increase it like the stars in the sky!" etc. The kneeling family repeat with her, *Ǎmen*. But no one knows who *Nan* (*Anan*) is; they only know that she is a goddess of procreation of the human race. Of the Mother of God there is no knowledge whatever.

[1] The Georgian equivalent is *Dchiakohona*, which is observed on Ash-Wednesday. *Dchiakohona*, according to Tchubinov, denotes "the leaping through the fire on Wednesday of Passion-week".

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796 On this day also they " lay the table ", that is, prepare a dinner,
[969] for the souls of the deceased, unless the day happens to be one of abstinence, i.e. Wednesday or Friday. In the latter event the feast takes place on the following day.

### (e) *Àdsyla-nə̀ẖwa*

On the same day of the Assumption is observed *Àdsyla-nə̀ẖwa* (cf. II (10)). The children are taken to a meadow where they are told to place their right legs against a tree. Each holding an *akwakwə̀r* in the right hand, they remain meekly in this position until the eldest in the family has addressed the prayer to " the spirit of the tree ", entreating " the great part of the deity of the tree " to safeguard them from giddiness, from falling off the tree, and from injuries. The children must eat their *akwakwə̀r* without removing their legs from the tree.

### (f) *Anàna-gùnda* (the goddess of bees)

796 This is both a spring and a summer feast.
231 In the spring, when the bees begin to hive, the eldest (" pure ") woman of the family takes some hirse (Geo. *p'etvi*) and an egg, and
[791] enters the apiary, where she passes the offerings three times over the hives, and prays to the goddess of the bees, *Anàna-gùnda :* " Submitting these as a pledge that the established offering will be made at the proper time, I humbly entreat thee, *Anàna-gùnda*, to be the guardian of our bees ; safeguard them from all illnesses, multiply them, and grant them a good crop ! " Hirse and the egg are hung over the apiary.

In the summer, between the 15th July and the end of August, before the gathering of the first honeycombs, more during August, on a Thursday or Saturday, the promised offering to the goddess
[780] *Anàna-gùnda* is made. A large corncake (*a-mgal*), stuffed with cheese, is baked, and placed on one of the hives ; also an egg. The family kneel in front of the offering, and the " pure " woman again invokes the mercy of *Anàna-gùnda* upon the honey bees, and says an improvised prayer. The family repeat a long drawn out *ə̀mən*.

After the ceremony, she divides the corncakes crosswise, into four parts, with two strokes of the knife ; and cuts these into smaller pieces. The family sit down there and then and dine. They do not
[621] forget the neighbours, sending a small piece each. The remains are placed in a basket and hung up in the apiary. Everybody passing by is obliged to enter the apiary and bless the honey bees and, scattering about a little hirse, eat a piece of corncake.

[178] In ancient times when the Abkhasians irreproachably observed all the rites, the gods were more merciful to them. Thus, the goddess

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Thus, the goddess
of the bees as a sign of her good disposition towards a given family 231
placed an egg (the egg of *Anàna-gùnda*) in one of the hives. No matter 776
how much honey they took from that hive, there would always be a plentiful supply of it.[1]

## IV. K'IRSA

Christmas is one of the four chief holidays[2] of the year. Abkhasians 796
call it *K'irsa* (Megr. *K'irsa*), which denotes Christ. An Abkhaz considers it a great disgrace if he fails on this day to kill a goat or some other animal. On this day "the table is laid" also for the souls [769] of ancestors.

### (a) *Agwə-nə̀hwa*

For some families it is obligatory to make an offering early in the morning on this day to *Agwə-nə̀hwa*, for which *akwakwər* are baked. The supplicant entreats that *Agwə-nə̀hwa* grant them the warmth of his eyes and his heart. In translation the word denotes, "praying to heart." This "praying" is also known to the Gurians, [171] under the name of "praying for the womb" (Geo. *Mutslis salotsavi*); Megrelians call it *Khatsitsi*.[3] According to I. Kipshidze, it is the New Year's Day breakfast.[4] In my opinion it is nothing more than a survival of the supplication described below.

### (b) *Got'anùa* (*sharp'ə-nə̀hwa*)

Some *gvari*-s have preserved to this day the following custom. On Christmas Eve, the family go to bed very early; they rise, however, at midnight, and begin praying. Enough chickens are killed to provide [262] one for every member of the family (blackbirds also may be used), [782] or in their place a young goat; *akwakwər* baked. All this is offered to *Got'anùa*; the food is consumed immediately after the prayer is ended, and the remains, if any, are not left but burnt without fail. All return to bed. The dawn must find them asleep. In Megrelian *got'ànua* denotes morning-twilight, dawn, to grow light, to dawn, the Abkhasian equivalent of which is *sharp'-nə̀hwa*, the morning prayer; the Megrelian term, however, is more in use.

I quote here the following story: "A female slave of a family,

[1] *Anàna*, in my opinion, is derived from *an*, mother; *gùnda*, probably from *gundi*, a swarm, a collection of something.

[2] Namely, the New Year, Easter, the Assumption, and Christmas.

[3] *Khatsitsi—khatsitsi* is called also a bride. (Cf. I. Kipshidze, *Gram. of the Megrelian Language*, s.v. *khat'itsi*.) (Ed. *Khrist. Vostok*.)

[4] *Grammar of the Megrelian Language*, s.v. (where is also a reference to the explanation of the same word in Georgian by V. Beridze, *Sitqvishona*, s.v., Ed. *Kh. V.*).

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I quote here the following story: "A female slave of a family, being angry with her masters, took a portion of the dough for *akwakwar* destined for the " god " *Got'anùa*, and placing it in a scoop of bitter-gourd (*akwapey*, Geo. *kopè*), hid it in the loft. As usual the family went to bed after the ceremony. But unfortunately for them the offended *Got'anùa* soundly thrashed all of them, using for the purpose the very same scoop in which had been hidden the dough destined for himself. This *gvari* makes propitiatory offerings at the will of sorcerers to *Got'anùa* twice a year, during the night before Christmas and before the Assumption.

*Got'anùa*, under the name of *Okhvàmuri*, evidently spread throughout Megrelia during the missionaryship of Lamberti.[1]

## V. Deities whose Cults have no Fixed Dates

### 1. *Et-nèkha—Àga-nèkha*

The sea, like other manifestations of nature, has its own " part of deity ", called *Àga-inkhwè* or *àga-intswakhwè*. An Abkhaz makes an offering to this deity when he goes to the sea coast for any considerable time. The sea deity is not to be trifled with ; if it is slighted it becomes turbulent, it surges, and punishes the unrespectful. Therefore even the children are forbidden to throw pebbles, or to spit into the sea. The worship of this deity has been preserved in its purest form among the Bzib Abkhasians, namely among the peasantry of the Gudout (Gudaut) district, of the *gvari* of Amp'aràa. It has been described by A. Tch(ukbar), in *Sotrudnik Zakavkazskoy Missii* (" The Collabarator of the Transcaucasian Mission "), 1912, p. 373 sqq., where the deity *Et-nèkh-Àga-nèkha* is called *Et-nykh Ag-Nykh*. *Àga* denotes sea, *(a)nèkh*—" icon." But what does the word *Et* denote ?[2]

### 2. *Àshkha-intswakhwè* (god of mountains)

Mountains also have " their part of God " known under the name of *Àshkha-intswakhwè*. *Àshkha* denotes mountain ; *intswakhwè*, " his (of the male rational being) part of God." I have pointed out above that the Abkhaz often uses the word *nèkha* in the sense of god, which in the Christian faith is understood, or more correctly, translated, as icon. The god of mountains " governs " all the mountains and the beasts inhabiting them. Abkhaz shepherds make offerings to this god twice a year, in the spring when they drive the cattle to the mountains, and in the autumn when they drive them back. To him are subject also mountain game. In order to preserve the game from

[1] A. Lamberti, op. cit., pp. 148–9.

[2] This word manifests a consonance with the Assyro-Babylonian name of the god of the sea, *Ea*. Is this a mere coincidence ?

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their enemies, the god ordered the bird *aqaqab* to watch over them; the Megrelians who have the same belief, call this bird *kakabi*.[1] As soon as this bird sights at a distance a hunter or some other enemy, it soars high up into the sky, and by screeching warns the game of the approach of danger. That is why this bird is always found near the beasts.

The god of the mountains demands respect. He punishes severely those bold enough to bathe in clear, transparent mountain streams. The Abkhaz shepherds do not, therefore, bathe in these streams, being afraid of drawing upon themselves the displeasure of the god of the mountains: the nude body is said to defile the waters of the mountain spirit.

### 3. *Azhwèyp'shaă* (gods of beasts and hunting)[2]

*Azhwèyp'shaă* are gods of beasts and of hunting. They dwell in impassable forests, and lead an ordinary family life. To them are subjected all game, and without their will no one can shoot bird or beast. These gods kill for themselves some wild animal, boil and eat its meat; they wrap the bones in its skin and then revive the animal by striking it with a wand. Only after an animal has been resurrected in this way is a hunter granted the right to shoot it, and then only the particular hunter for whom the gods have destined it: no one else, try as much as he will, can kill it. Of this the Abkhasians are aware, and they employ the following characteristic greeting when they encounter a fellow hunter: *sp'sà-aahhàw yàzp'shàr*, "Which is destined to die, that (animal) is waiting for thee!" the answer being, "For both of us is waiting!"

A few words may be said about the way in which Abkhasians divine the success or failure of their hunting on the day of the Assumption. Before starting out the hunter takes a sharp knife and repeatedly strikes the table, cutting nicks in it. Passing his palm over the table, he says: "Whether thou sayest fifteen, whether I say fifteen, whoever says fifteen (it will be) thirty, fifteen." If the nicks thus cut number exactly fifteen it is a good omen; the gods will reward him with game.

The Abkhasians learnt this method in the following manner. A hunter once followed a wild goat, but he could not shoot it. It led him into the thick of a wood, where he saw a huge cauldron, around which sat gods. They invited him to join them. Nearby stood a goat. They killed the latter and invited the hunter to partake of the meal. When the gods began to throw bones into the hide, the hunter concealed one of them, putting in its place a small stick (or a small knife,

[1] The word is consonant with the Georgian *Kakabi*, partridge.
[2] The term is construed as plural.

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224 539 according to another version). The gods revived the goat and destined it to fall a prey to our hunter. On the following morning, on his way back, he sighted a wild goat, killed it, and to his horror and amazement in its body he found his stick (knife).[1]

These *azhwėyp'shaă* have eternally youthful daughters, who often have love affairs with the hunters whom they reward with plenty of game. They select bachelor hunters as their object of love. One of them, however, once fell madly in love with a married Abkhaz; their friendship lasted for many years; often she herself visited him. One day, at dawn, the hunter's wife found the daughter of the gods, whose beauty was more than earthly, in the arms of her husband. The two were asleep on the balcony of the corncrib. A light breeze had disturbed the golden curls of the lovely goddess, and a few tresses lay in the dust. The wife acted in a manner born of pure love and sympathy. Quietly approaching the sleeping couple she lifted up the golden curls of the beautiful goddess and placed them so that they would not fall into the dust. When the goddess awakened she was so struck with the magnanimity of the beautiful wife of her beloved that she restored her husband to her, and forever forbade her sister-goddesses to have love affairs with married men.

224 Hunting is a sacred sport to the Abkhasians, and it is the custom never to talk of the hunter when he is hunting, but to say, if necessary, "he has gone somewhere." The hunters divide their prey into equal proportions; the head of the animal or bird, however, is given in addition to the one who killed it. Anybody whom the hunters encounter by chance also gets an equal share. Nor are the neighbours forgotten. Each goes up to the prey, and sprinkling it and also the successful hunter with some grain, says: "May gods grant thee a better one on another occasion!"

[536] Any kind of falsehood or evasion of the rules of hunting consecrated by custom is severely punished by order from above. The following story may be quoted as an illustration of this:—

[539] A well-known hunter once killed a wild goat, and another hunter, having heard a shot, ran up to him. The successful hunter said: "Behind that corner there is hiding another goat which you can easily follow up; it will be better to take home a kill each than to divide one between." The second hunter ran in the direction indicated but found no goat there. For this lie the gods punished not only the hunter himself but also his whole *guari*; they have never since shot a single head of game.

[1] This story is written down from the words of A. Kardava, a Megrelian shepherd. In his version the wild boar figures instead of the goat, and *tqashi-mep'a*, king of the woods, instead of *Azhwėyp'shaă*.

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### 4. *Àbna-intswakhwò* (god of the woods)

The woods also have their "part of deity", *Àbna-intswakhwò*. 776 824
*Àbna* denotes wood, forest; *intswakhwò* we already know. When an Abkhaz enters a forest, or if he has to pass a night there, he prays to this deity for protection. I have, however, failed to collect more information about this god of the woods.

*Àbna-wowyò*

In ancient times the forests of Abkhasia were inhabited by *Àbna-wowyò*, "forest-people." *Àbna* denotes forest, and *a-wowyò*, man. 539
They were strong and courageous, but very ugly in appearance. Their bodies were covered with bristle-like hair. From their breasts projected a strange object, shaped like an axe and strong as steel, which served as a weapon; and by pressing an enemy to their breasts they could cut him into two. They preyed incessantly upon the people, who, however, in the long run, and with God's help, destroyed them. The last of them dwelt in an impassable forest, called Urak', near the village of Adzvibzha. In the same forest there lived also the courageous Khukhw Dchit'anàà, with his herd. Between Khukhw and this "forest-man" there was intense animosity. The ugly "forest-man" would come to Khukhw's hut every midnight, and inquire: "Dchit'anàà Khukhw,[1] art thou at home?" "Yes, I am. If thou art not an old woman come and fight me," responded the fearless Abkhaz. The "forest-man", however, would never agree to a single combat. Khukhw, tired at last of these childish pranks, resorted to a ruse. Placing a log in his bed, he went outside and hid behind a bush not far from the hut. At midnight the "forest-man" came as usual, and receiving no reply, he concluded that Khukhw was soundly asleep. Entering the hut and seeing, as he thought, the sleeping form of his enemy, he was about to aim a blow at the log, when the Abkhaz, who had crept in unawares, fired a shot at him. The "forest-man", although mortally wounded, managed to crawl away, and on the following morning Khukhw followed up the blood-stained footprints, and finding the dead body of his enemy, buried him with due honours. Khukhw appropriated the wealth of the last "forest-man", and also married his beautiful wife. . . .

### 5. *Atswaqwa*, the rainbow

The god of the rainbow is very vindictive; he soars high in the clouds and punishes, either by death or the infliction of disease, all 776 824

[1] A peculiarity of the Abkhasian: the surname precedes the Christian name.

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who transgress against him. In order to avoid incurring the anger of this god, an Abkhaz will not draw water or wash himself when the rainbow is in the sky, and is generally careful about the use of water. Like any other god, *Atswaqwa* may bestow the " warmth of his eyes and his heart ", in return for offerings and prayers. Whoever is affected by his wrath, grows icteritious, emaciated, to save his life he must, at the direction of the sorceresses, make the following offering to the rainbow god :—

On one of the Thursdays [1] the old (" pure ") women take the sick person to the river, pass (Geo. *shemoavleben*) around his head 4–5 yards of variegated chintz, and pray : " The great god ! Acknowledging his transgressions this sick person (the name is mentioned) has appeared before thee, and humbly entreats thee to accept this chintz as a pledge that he will perform the established offering at the proper time, at the direction of the sorceresses ! "

On the following Thursday he is taken again to the same river and place. Usually three women say the prayer, but there may be seven. Men, with the exception of the patient, are not allowed to be present at this ceremony. The sick person is dressed entirely in white. The eldest woman [2] kills a capon and a hen ; women carry out all the duties, preparing *ashwamkydt'*, " *ghomi* " (millet pudding), *akwakwar*, and *atcha-gvazdl* (Geo. *ghvezeli*, an oblong bread), of each of which there must be seven of the usual, and seven of the very small size. All these are placed on *ashwamkydt'*, on which also burn seven wax candles. The prayer is said by the eldest woman. The patient kneels in front of the offering ; he is taken home immediately the ceremony is over, and he must not look back. The seven small *akwakwar*, *atcha-gvazdl*, and seven small portions of *ghomi* (*abzst'a*—millet porridge), are thrown into the water ; they represent the share of the female slaves (*aht'ap'hwas*) of the rainbow god. Everything else is consumed by the women themselves ; the remains being thrown into the river, for nothing must be taken home.

Muhammadans must also burn candles at this offering. The candles are fixed on a kind of hoop made of grape vine. At the end of the ceremony the hoop with the burning candles is thrown into the river.

It should be noted that in some parts of the country this god is called *Atswaqwa-elia* (the Rainbow-Eliah). So at least he was called, according to the testimony of D. I. Gulia, by Javaz, the famous woman supplicant.

[1] Thursday in Megrelian is *txenbba*, the day of the sky. It is noteworthy that the Abkhasians perform usually on the day of the sky, the majority of rites that are seemingly connected with the sky, as in the case given.

[2] The Abkhasian women kill animals only on occasions of certain offerings.

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### 6. *Akhyə Zoshən*

The Abkhasians ascribe diseases generally to supernatural influences or gods, but some diseases have their own special gods. The god of small-pox, for example, is *Akhyə Zoshən* (the golden Zoskhan), and also his consort, the goddess *Khanla Shkwədkwa* (Khania the white). How important are the gods of the Abkhasians may be judged from the following circumstance which took place during the spring of 1914 in one of the settlements of the village Jgerdi. Throughout the winter and spring of the year Abkhasia was in the grip of a severe epidemic of small-pox. In order to check the spread of the disease vaccinators were sent to the affected areas. The following account of what happened was described to me by P. Janashia, one of the vaccinators. A certain settlement, fearing that the gods might wreak vengeance upon them, refused to admit the vaccinators; they preferred to safeguard themselves against this terrible disease, *atswarp'shdzə* (small-pox), by the adoption of the gods. *Atswə* denotes skin, rind, and *ap'shdzə*, pretty, beautiful; the whole, in translation, denoting "that which decorates (beautifies) the skin".

By pooling their resources, the settlement raised enough money to buy a couple of snow-white goats and a sufficiency of provisions, and made an expedition into the forest. Here, amidst the quietude and peace of over-hanging leaves, a sumptuous feast was prepared for the divine guests. When everything was ready, and the victim had been placed, according to custom, on *ashwamkyadə'*, the head of the settlement said the prayer and made the offering to the gods. Nearby stood two bedsteads, adorned with silk bedclothes, on which sat two young women, an *aznauri* and a peasant woman; their naked breasts were covered with silk handkerchiefs. The whole assembly knelt down, while the head of the settlement implored the gods to accept their offering by kissing the breasts of the most beautiful women of the settlement, and thus become, in accordance with the ancestral custom, adopted sons of the settlement. Near the "foster-mothers of gods" stood two of the finest horses, one with a side saddle. The sumptuous feast followed the ceremony of adoption, and afterwards the people, holding the horses by the bridle, on which were to be riding the newly adopted gods, *Akhyə Zoshən* and *Khanla Shkwədkwa*, escorted the precious guests to the accompaniment of song, far away from the settlement. Thus they "turned away", or warded off, the small-pox.

"You may not believe it," an Abkhaz from the settlement told me, "but this 'adoption' saved us from the small-pox; not one of us fell a victim to it. You, the learned, have caused our ruin by bringing down upon us the anger of the gods of our fathers," he concluded, with a deep sigh.